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SUBJECT: Lebanon: Media Reaction - December 16, 2008

Atmospherics:

The shoe-throwing incident continued to dominate lead stories, editorials, and cartoons. The press also highlighted Hizballah Secretary General Nasrallah's call for a series of activities in order to lift the siege against Gaza.

Reports noted that Nasrallah's move is the first "public" support for Hamas and reflects Hizballah's feeling that the situation in Gaza is dangerous and Hamas should not be left alone. One editorialist also noted that Nasrallah's call for Egypt to open the Rafah Crossing is a position that is not only meant to help the Palestinians, but also to exert pressure on Egypt which has tensed relations with Iran.

Selected Headlines

"At Last Salary Increases Have Been Ratified; Hale in Beirut to Prepare for Elections..." Pro-Syria Ad-Diyar

"An Election Bazar at the Parliament" Independent Al-Balad

"Nasrallah Calls on People to Make a Move: Blockading A Million and a Half People is a Crime" Pro-Syria Ad-Diyar

Block Quotes:

"Arab Thought and Meditation in the Al-Zeidi Shoe," an editorial by Jihad El-Zein in moderate, anti-Syrian An-Nahar (12/16):

"...The shoe of an Iraqi journalist has become the first -- or perhaps the only -- symbol for change in the Arab world that was proposed by the neo-conservative class in the United States and adopted by Bush. ...The flying shoe towards this extraordinary target represents the peak of Arab political two-tracked thought: rejection of change in the Arab world coming through American tanks; and, failure to embark upon this change by the Arabs themselves. ...This shoe has become a symbol for millions of Arabs in societies full with people who are not working, and who put on old shoes and adopt radical thoughts. ...If we have to be fair, however, this shoe should have been a Palestinian shoe. ...President Bush's biggest sin was to leave behind the peace settlement between Israel and the Palestinians. ...He also sabotaged a possible settlement between Israel and Syria. ...Arab 'shoe though' i.e., the Arab's failure to come up with their own project for change, will nevertheless digest this 'great incident' because the language of Arab anger is ready to celebrate. ...This new 'Baghdadi' phenomenon - which is the Arab 'no' without an Arab project - should be studied. ...The problem is that it will only be studied in advanced universities outside of the Arab world - and a number of these advanced universities will definitely be in the United States."

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